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The Emmigration of the Soviet Jews to Israel

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THE EMIGRATION OF THE SOVIET JEWS TO ISRAEL

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"For next year in Jerusalem." Those words have a place on every Jewish holiday, in every Jewish religious observance, and are even spoken in every Jewish prayer. In the Soviet Union as in other countries, the Holy Land forms a true basis for the Jewish faith. But perhaps in the Soviet Union, "For next year in Jerusalem" is spoken with more anticipation than elsewhere in the world. Since 1968, the Jews of the U.S.S.R. have been leaving their homeland to return to what they consider to be their real home--the state of Israel. Peaking first in 1979 with 51,000 Jews emigrating, and then with a tremendous surge in 1990 of over 200,000 emigrating, there exists what one can only term an exodus of the Jewish people from the Soviet Union. This exodus, for several reasons, is beneficial for the three major parties involved: the Soviet Union, which is finding a new way to look at those of the Jewish faith even while bestowing upon them the freedom to leave its confines; the Soviet-Jewish emigrants, who now have the freedom to seek for whatever reasons a different way of life than they have known; and the state of Israel, a nation founded upon the idea of becoming a homeland and safe haven for Jews around the world.

Part I: Development and Determination of the Jewish National Consciousness

Certainly the rise of the Jewish national consciousness is a pivotal issue when one considers an exodus of such magnitude. There are many factors to be considered when tracing this rise through history. The ascendancy of a "Jewish identity" appears to be very much dependent on the treatment or, rather, the mistreatment of the Jews as a separate ethnic group. And the cultural background and ethnic identity which kept a nation of people cemented together when they were, in effect, homeless is very much enhanced when they actually acquire a land of their own. By tracing the formative factors--including governmental legislation, social organization, and outside considerations--to the present, one may plot the development of a Jewish national consciousness and consider its implications.

The Tsars

Throughout practically the entire course of history, the Jews have been constantly harried and maligned. In 1727, following a precedent set first in fourteenth century England, then in France, and then in Spain in the sixteenth century, the Russian state expelled the Jewish people. The

causes ranged from the singular threat they posed to a growing Russian national consciousness to the growth of Christianity. This event set the stage for centuries of Russian and Soviet anti-Semitism.

As the Muscovite state evolved into the Russian Empire, the perceived threat by the Jewish people to the nationalist identity eased somewhat. They were permitted back in the country, but the areas in which they were allowed to settle were restricted. Under Catherine II, the term "Pale of the Jewish Settlement" was first used. It defined the areas in which the Jews could dwell freely. Under subsequent rulers, the "Pale of the Jewish Settlement" contracted or expanded to fit the particular need of the day. Alexander I issued the most restricted decree, stating that all Jews must live in urban areas within the boundaries of the old "Pale."

Towards the end of the Imperial regime, the controls placed upon the Jews became much harsher. Under Alexander II and Alexander III they were the subject of a group of measures known as the May Laws. These regulations again limited the possible settlements of the Jews to towns and villages within the "Pale"; they restricted Jews from conducting business on Sundays and Christian holidays; and they outlined a quota system for Jewish entrance to secondary schools and universities. The quota system was set up because Jewish students "were 'quick in joining the ranks of the revolutionary workers.'"[1] After years of

repression, the May Laws elicited some interesting responses.

The first reply to the constant repression was a most eminently logical one: the Jews fled the country. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, there were approximately four million Jews in the Russian Empire.[2] Lester Eckman, founder of he Judaic Research Institute, estimates that by 1915 fully two million Jews had emigrated.[3] Although free emigration was strictly forbidden, any Jew wishing to move west would almost certainly be granted an exit visa.

The second response was somewhat more complicated and was not exactly limited to the Russian Jews. This was the development of various social movements, the one of paramount importance being that of Zionism. J.B. Schechtman, a leading member of the Jewish Agency and the World Jewish Congress, points out that the first meeting of *Hovevei Zion* (Lovers of Zion) occurred in 1884, thirteen years before the first Zionist conference in Basel.[4] Thus, Zionism had some of its deepest roots in Russia. Indeed, as Schechtman again notes, the majority of the forty settlements that existed in Palestine before World War I were of Russian origin.[5]

The formative tenets of Zionism were quite simple: the Jews should have a national homeland once again; their homeland should be where the ancient state of Israel was; and eventually the world's population of Jews would live in

that nation. There were several factions within the Zionist movement, but by and large these basic beliefs were constant.

The fact that a large portion of the Jews in Russia wanted to form a separate nation did not seem to overly alarm the government; however, the effect of Zionism on the ordinary Russian was extreme. Zionism to the everyday Ivan on the street was regarded as an insidious plot by the Jews, already the source of all problems, to take over the world. The first step--the militant organization of the Jewish people--was already underway. The rumors did much to cause social unease and were often extreme enough to cause rioting and vicious pogroms.[6]

Zionism, the most important responsive social movement, was still only one movement. Some of the Jews took a very opposite viewpoint and turned to a socialist or Russian nationalist Jewry as an answer to the repression by the Tsars. These Jews, the most prominent of which formed a political party known as the *Fareinikte*, were to play an instrumental part in the overthrow of the Tsarist regime. They still believed there was hope for a viable Jewish faith in the Russian Empire, and all that was required to make that hope a reality was the social and political change found in revolution.

With a massive wave of continuing emigration, and a social situation filled with Zionist or nationalist organizations, the Russian Empire headed into the First

World War and a revolution which would change the political atmosphere of the nation forever. With the overthrow of Nicholas II and the toppling of the Provisional Government, Vladimer Lenin, leader of the Soviets, brought his ideas and ideology to the Russian Jewish scene.

Lenin

With Lenin's advent to power, the Jews appeared to be in a better position than ever before. Lenin claimed that he was a leader for the oppressed--and who was more oppressed than the Jews? He advocated equality to all people, and he promised them a new kind of freedom. In his own political party there were several prominent Jews. In fact, anti-Semites tended to equate communism with the feared Jewish world conspiracy,[7] and if the entire communist movement could be mistaken as a completely Jewish occurrence, surely this boded well for the Jews. The facts, however, fail to bear out this conclusion.

Even though Karl Marx was a Jew, he was bitterly anti-Semitic.[8] Lenin usually followed Marx's teachings. He was not opposed to changing those teachings to suit his needs, though. In the case of the Jews, Lenin could not afford to be anti-Semitic for pragmatic reasons, and he did not choose to be anti-Semitic for philosophical reasons. One of the practical reasons was that a good part of the Communist Party was composed of Jews, usually those Russian

nationalists exemplified by the members of the *Fareinikte*. A second was that he needed and wanted a unified Soviet nation, and overt anti-Semitism was diametrically opposed to unification. Philosophically, the idea of anti-Semitism was, to Lenin, a great hindrance to the equality he sought.

Although Lenin opposed anti-Semitism, his position was a bit more narrow than most people perceived. Anti-Semitism was singling out the Jew just because he was a Jew. This, Lenin was against. His feelings regarding what actually went into being a Jew was a different story altogether. The Jewish cultural heritage was a hindrance to national assimilation, and thus all the Jewish schools and traditions should be done away with. Religion was not tolerated in a Communist country; the Jewish ways of worship had to die. Zionism, with its dream of a totally separate Jewish nation, was a definite hindrance to Soviet assimilation and nationalization, and could not be tolerated.

Under Lenin, laws were passed mahing Zionism, and indeed all Jewish political parties, illegeal. Jewish institutions were dismantled, synagogues closed, and their possessions expropriated. Everyone under eighteen was prohibited from receiving a religious education outside the home. Ironically, most of these decrees were either suggested or carried out by Jewish Communists.

It can be argued that this was one of the lowest ebbs for the Jewish national consciousness. The Jewish people

were split into two very antagonistic factions: The Communists and the Zionists. The unity given to the Jewish people as they sought to weather Tsarist discrimination seemed but a memory now as hope took the Jewish people in two different directions. The damage done to the Jewish identity was all the more obvious when one realizes that Lenin, by attacking the religion and the traditions of the Jews, was attacking those very things which had served as their strength and their stay through centuries of persecution under the Tsars.

Stalin

Under Stalin, the Soviet-Jewish national consciousness made perhaps more solidifying gains than under any other leader. During the first few years, there was a continued attack carried out by the Jewish Communists on the existing Zionist organizations. Around 1930, however, such harassment dropped to almost nothing. A propaganda campaign was launched instead, its purpose merely to remind the non-Jews of the evils of Zionism. The official Party line was that Zionism was dead," but for some reason, the propaganda campaign against it continued.

With the outbreak of World War II, the party had to take notice of Zionism once again. With the annexation of portions of Poland, Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania the Soviet Union added well over two

million Jews to its population. More than that, these Jews had not experienced the Soviet assault on Jewish cultural identity. When the *zapadniki*, the Westerners, came into contact with their culturally deprived neighbors, they were able to revive that Jewish spirit. Zionism was induced into the Soviet-Jewish bloodstream like a vaccine--transforming the ailing Jewish culture into something that the Jews could again be proud of.

Stalin made conscious contributions as well. As a ploy to gain worldwide support for the Soviet cause, he publically eased his stance on the Jewish situation. He even sent Jewish envoys to plead for Zionist understanding and sympathy for the Soviet war effort. As a natural outgrowth of this strategy, Stalin had to declare his support for a Jewish state in Palestine. By the time the war was over, Stalin was touting a pro-Jewish policy.

The Soviet Union now lined up to back the Jewish state of Israel, and in 1948, just after the creation of the state of Israel, the USSR received her first Israeli delegation, headed by Golda Meir. The outpouring of joy and the demonstrations held in her honor served impressively to solidify the Soviet Jews.

At the same time Stalin was publicly on the Jewish side, he was still executing or exiling a significant portion of the highest ranking Jewish leaders. As soon as Ms. Meir left the Soviet Union, Stalin had any Jew who had taken part in the demonstrations either locked up or

exiled.[10] Emigration to Israel was barred; Schechtman states that "from 15 May 1948, till the end of 1951, only four old women and one disabled ex-serviceman were permitted to leave for Israel."[11]

This peculiar type of hidden anti-Semitism continued up until Stalin's death. When the news was announced of the "Doctor's Plot," the six Jews involved were charged as being "Zionist spies."[12] In the last years of his life, Stalin had allowed relations with Israel to cool considerably. However, now that Soviet Jews knew that the Jewish state existed, they seemed magnetically drawn together in what can only be described as a national Jewish identity. The beginnings of the Jewish national consciousness was laid, fueled by Israel's existence but with its roots far back in the days of the Tsars.

1953-1968

Under G. Malenkov, interim leader of the Soviet state, the gripping waves of anti-Semitism ceased for a brief while. When N. Khrushchev, leader of the USSR until 1968, took over, there was a slow but inexorable return to anti-Semitism. Khrushchev seemed to share Stalin's policy when it came to the Jewish question: publicly deny any knowledge of anti-Semitism but in secret do as much to the Jew as possible. Eckman proposes that while de-Stalinization was a primary goal of Khrushchev's, he

still had to appease the Party hard-liners who had approved of Stalin, and thus he did nothing to help the Jews.[13] Whether or not this was the case, it is a fact that Khrushchev was challenged openly several times about his refusals even to let families be united in Israel, and he always avoided the issue.[14]

During the "Thaw" after Stalin, Jewish national consciousness surfaced, and the Jewish people were obviously dissatisfied with life in the Soviet Union. Laurie Salitan, chair of the W. Averell Harriman Institute's Seminar on Soviet Republics and Regional Issues, points out, that the typical Soviet Jew still waited for domestic reforms up until 1967-68, and it was not until the Soviet government took a pro-Arab and anti-Israeli stance in the Arab-Israeli War of 1967 and subsequently invaded Czechoslovakia that the Jewish people began to realize that there was no hope for a peaceful Jewish existence in the Soviet Union.[15] It was at this time that the Soviet government began allowing emigration of Polish Jews, and with the Poles as an example, the rest of the Soviet Jews queued up to emigrate. The first contemporary wave of emigration was on.

Part II: Emigration from a Soviet Standpoint; Policy, Causes and Effects

The period from 1968 until 1990 was characterized by some dramatic changes in the Soviet government's attitude toward the Jews. A total of three distinct waves of Soviet-Jewish emigration occurred, each with its specific causes.

The First Wave

The first wave of emigration encompassed the period from 1968 through 1974, beginning after a total embargo that followed the Six-Day War. In 1968, a total of only 229 Jews were permitted to emigrate; in 1969, the number grew to 2,979.[1] Peaking in 1973 with 34,733, the number of emigrants reached, comparatively, mass proportions.[2]

There were several Soviet requirements for participation in this first wave: one had to be invited by a relative then living in Israel; and one had to apply for an exit visa, which entailed obtaining a referral letter from an employer. After these conditions were filled, emigration was only as far away as governmental approval of the application. If the application were approved, then all that was left to do was to head to Vienna, or some other connection point, and transfer to a plane headed for

Israel.

The official policy of the Soviet government allowed emigration solely for the reunification of families, hence the prerequisite of an invitation. In actuality, the Soviet motive at that time is somewhat difficult to discern. Did the Soviets allow the Jews to emigrate because of Jewish agitation? Or did the Soviets permit their departure because foreign policy made it desirable?

Laurie P. Salitan develops the former theory, basically stating that the Jews were allowed to leave because of the trouble they were causing. She proposes that the Soviet government realized that by allowing a few of the more socially animated Jews to leave, social, economic, and political benefits could accrue. The government theorized, in this scenario, that they would let a few of the activists leave before their actions became an example to others, thus ridding themselves of a destabilizing element.[3] Salitan also points out that the first wave included many elderly and infirm emigrants, and that they represented the least economically valuable segment for the Soviet Union.[4] An economic benefit occurred, therefore, because costly pension funds could now be diverted to more useful economic concerns.

The second theory deals with foreign policy. During the late sixties and early seventies, a desire for *detente* with the United States was a very important Soviet priority. Their pursuit of SALT I is evidence of this

interest, and its cause may partly lie in the Soviet fear of improved Sino-American friendship. In this theory, known as the barometer thesis, Soviet negotiators realized that increased emigration was conducive to a relaxed international atmosphere. The barometer thesis also traces Soviet-American relations through the periods of Jewish emigration, and seeks to draw a direct relationship between the two. The warmer Soviet-American relations, the higher the emigration totals.[5] Certainly the argument is fairly easy to substantiate with reference to emigration statistics and U.S.-Soviet trade, and for the most part it remains apparently error-free. The theory is not, however, entirely without fault.

Salitan, addressing the barometer thesis directly, points out several flaws in its basic assumptions. She asserts that given the perspective of time, it is unlikely that emigration would have endured if it had been directly linked to U.S. relations. For example, emigration began several years before *detente* became a significant factor. Despite close scrutiny by the West, Jewish dissidents were constantly and consistently harassed. Finally, the Soviet attitude toward Jewish cultural and religious life remained harsh, and grew even more hostile as exposure to the West increased.[6]

Whatever its causes, the first wave ended in 1973. One historian, writing during the period of the first wave, states that the Soviet government had three methods of

discouraging emigration: "anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist propaganda, harassment of those applying for emigration visas, and repression in the form of arrests and trials."[7] The propaganda came in two forms, anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli. The Soviet government began checking the degree to which visa applicants were related to the issuers of their invitations to Israel. If the relationship was not an immediate family relationship, they would deny the applicant a visa. This was extremely serious for the refused applicant, because he or she had more than likely lost a job when asking for the necessary referral letters. Thus was created a jobless group of *refuseniks*. The Soviet government also began holding a series of show trials, apparently aimed at curbing the emigration of scientists and engineers.[8] These measures had the immediate effect of dropping emigration levels, but there was now an undercurrent of domestic tension which would inevitably find an outlet.

The Second Wave

The second wave was the result of the internal tension created by the ending of the first. It is doubtful whether Soviet authorities believed that by attempting to release only certain prominent activists that they would inspire the rest of the Jewish population to do so. However, this is exactly what happened. The hostile climate created by

the Soviet policy only served to inspire and encourage other Jews to leave. During the years 1975 through 1977, Soviet Jewish emigration averaged around 14,000 a year, a substantial number, but still a drop from the over 30,000 in 1972-73. However, by 1979, Soviet Jewish emigration had reached an all-time high of 51,320 emigrants.[9]

The second wave was little more than an outgrowth of the first, although it would come to dwarf its predecessor in magnitude. Soviet reaction to the threat of mass emigration in 1973 was to clamp down, using methods which have already been outlined. The intensified pressure on the Soviet Jews, in their increasingly hostile environment, served only to make them want to leave. Even with the threat of joblessness and anti-Semitic harassment, Soviet Jews lined up to emigrate. The number of visa applicants grew steadily from 1975 to 1979, and the Soviet government ultimately let them leave.

First and foremost, the Soviet government permitted the emigration because a crackdown on the entire Jewish population, although not without precedent, was decidedly not feasible. Second, the result of the officially sponsored anti-Semitic propaganda was an increase in ethnic tensions, and emigration served in a small way to reduce that tension. One additional reason was that with a significant portion of the Jewish *intelligentsia* leaving, places in universities and other important job opportunities were opening up, and a process of national

assimilation could take place with these vacant positions going to national elites.[10]

These openings in the educated elite, however, caused a great deal of governmental concern. Taking steps to ensure that the Soviet Union was not hurt by the mass emigration of the Jews, the Kremlin began denying Jews entrance to universities in excess of the already stringent quotas. In 1968, one-third of the Jewish population was university-educated, compared with only four percent of the total population. But, from 1977 to 1979, not one Jew was admitted to the faculty of mathematics at Moscow State University. From 1979 to 1980, only four Jews were a part of the 400-500 students annually enrolled.[11] The government was trying to wean the country from the extremely dense content of Jews in mental (*umstevenyi*) labor positions.[12] Despite this precaution, Soviet authorities once again felt the need to clamp down on the Jewish exodus.

Emigration fell consistently throughout 1980, so that by the end of that year only 21,471 Jews were allowed to emigrate.[13] This trend continued through 1986, when only 914 Jews emigrated.[14] Proponents of the barometer thesis advance several arguments for this second, and much more severe, restriction. The United States had consistently denied the Most Favored Nation trade status to the Soviet Union since 1974. Furthermore, the mass emigration of 1979 went almost totally unnoticed by President Jimmy Carter.[15]

This may have angered the Soviet leadership into a hardening of their position. Thomas Naylor, Professor of Economics and Business Administration at Duke University, comments that between 1974 and 1982 the whole fabric of *detente* came unraveled because of issues such as Angola, Afghanistan, Poland, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Andrei Sakharov, the Soviet natural-gas pipeline to Western Europe, and last but not least, the arms race.[16] Opponents of the barometer thesis cite this same material and ask why it took until 1980 for such serious material to have any effect.[17]

Looking at the internal tension thesis, one finds other explanations for the drastic drop in emigration during the eighties. Salitan points out that the scale of the mass exodus could not be ignored in the eighties, because it was a time for declining economic and population growth in the Soviet Union. Having realized that family reunification is a never-ending process, the government had to act when 12.7 percent of the Jewish population had already emigrated.[18] Salitan also theorizes that the Soviet regime felt the need to assert control over a problem which it probably assessed as out of hand.[19]

The Third Wave

The third wave of Soviet Jewish emigration began in 1987. During that year, there was a definite thaw in

Soviet-American relations. In December of 1987, President Ronald Reagan of the U.S. and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev came together for a third summit meeting. Also in December 1987, more Soviet Jews were allowed to emigrate than during any other month since 1981.[20] The exodus had begun.

There were several reasons to believe that the thaw in Soviet emigration policy as of 1987 was a temporary measure. The internal tension thesis would assert that Gorbachev was basically trying to get rid of a small portion of his population which was jobless (as a result of their visa applications) and inherently worthless to the Soviet economy. Appeasing Western nations clamoring for free emigration further recommended the idea, so he very wisely let the *refuseniks* emigrate. Once they were gone, he could always tighten the controls and keep home the more valuable members of the Jewish community (the engineers and scientists).[21] This argument formed the basis for the theory that Gorbachev considered the emigration of the Jews to be a temporary phenomenon. Salitan adds that the restriction of emigration to one group could lead to greater demands to emigrate on the side of other ethnic minorities, a situation she is sure Gorbachev wishes to avoid.[22] With her arguments in mind, one may conjecture that Gorbachev originally intended this second wave of Soviet Jews to be a temporary thing, and it is because of something akin to the barometer thesis that he cannot now

end the exodus. Observing the growing number of emigres, world opinion has grown too strong, and there are too many advantages occurring as a result of the emigration for Gorbachev to stop it now. Moreover, the emigration has become secondary to a domestic reform that has risen out of the emigration controversy.

There are many indicators of a loosening in the overall Soviet domestic scene during the years 1987-1990. Many of these indicators deal specifically with Soviet Jewry. On 7 December 1987, the Soviet government disbanded its official "Anti-Zionist Committee."[23] As a sign of reduced tensions on the lowest levels, kosher food appeared in the official state stores late in 1987.[24] And the growing number of Jews permitted to emigrate serves as an indicator of domestic policy as well.

In 1987, there were 8,155 total Jewish emigrants. In 1988, there were 18,961 emigrants, followed by 71,142 in 1989 and over 200,000 in 1990.[25] Not only did the number of emigrants keep growing, but the magnitude of domestic policy kept pace. In July 1988, a Soviet filmmaking team attended the Jerusalem Film Festival, and for the first time in history a Soviet government sanctioned films with predominantly Jewish themes.[26] Later that same month, the first Israeli delegation to the Soviet Union in twenty years arrived.[27] In November of 1988, the Soviets, for the first time since 1917, allowed Hebrew language classes to be officially taught.[28] In February 1989, Jewish cultural

centers were legalized. The first opened in Moscow that same month, followed by Jewish cultural organizations in at least a dozen cities at the end of 1989.[29] In October 1990, the head of the anti-Semitic group *Pamyat*, in a court case "without precedent in the USSR," was tried and convicted of stirring up ethnic hatred, and sentenced to a two-year term in jail.[30]

As one final example of what must be considered the greatest rehabilitation of an ethnic group ever, there is the subject of direct plane flights to Israel. Since 1980, Israel has asked for direct flights from the Soviet Union to Israel to prevent the loss of Jewish emigrants going to places besides Israel (the so-called drop-out phenomenon). For years the Soviet government refused, saying that such flights would constitute "coercion,"[31] and that the emigrants should have the power of choice. On 29 September 1990, the Soviet Union agreed to direct flights to Israel, serving only to exemplify how far Soviet-Israeli relations have come.[32]

Despite the remarkable number of positive indicators occurring in the Soviet Union, there are still hints of a darker force, reminders of a time not yet passed. In late 1987, the KGB resorted to their time-honored tactic of force to quiet a group of Jewish protestors.[33] Even in 1990, anti-Semitism was a major issue in the Soviet Union. Early in February, the KGB issued an appeal for calm to counteract the rumors and threats of pogroms against the

Jews.[34] Again in July, Pravda contained an article on how anti-Semitism threatened to undermine the political and economic reforms of the country.[35] The fact that the article was even written shows how far Soviet society has come, but its content underscores how far it still has to go.

The examples of what is, in effect, the rehabilitation of Jewish culture, point out how hard it will be to shut the now open door. Free emigration is taking place, and it is only a signal and a symbol of what may yet happen. The climate necessary for such emigration as is occurring is dangerously two-faceted: the door must be open, and the leaders of the Soviet state must desire to keep it open; however, there must be a reason that so many Jews want to leave. Be that as it may, one cannot help but see the positive cultural reforms of which the Jewish emigration has been a catalyst, and believe that the Jewish Exodus has been a positive occurrence in the Soviet Union.

Part III: The Soviet Jewish Emigrant

While the mere fact of Jewish ethnic identity indicates certain accepted characteristics, a closer look at emigration patterns points to an even more exclusive set of emigrant-specific traits. The most important of these identifying components includes a general agreement on point of origin, reason for leaving, and final destination. Through the course of modern Soviet Jewish emigration, there has been a definite shift in emigration composition, especially with regard to these three categories.

The Early Emigrants

Until 1974, emigration from the Soviet Union was basically driven by religious reasons. Israel was considered the home of the Jewish people--their nation. The Zionist background of the Soviet Jews was one of the strongest motivators for emigrating. Naturally, then, the emigrant pool was made up of Jews coming from those areas where Zionism was the strongest, namely the regions annexed by the Soviets in World War II and the outlying, least nationalized (Russified) areas such as Georgia and Central Asia.[1] In these districts, the Jews had been able to resist the nationalization which would have threatened their Jewish cultural identity, and therefore had a strong

desire to unite with the state of Israel for truly Zionist reasons.

Demographically, this pattern of the non-Sovietized Jew is dramatic. Ninety-eight percent of the pre-1974 emigrants went to Israel.[2] The bulk of this number came from the less nationalized areas--thirty five percent of all Jews going to Israel came from Georgia,[3] where less than 2.5 percent of Soviet Jews resided.[4] The fact that these early emigrants went to Israel, coupled with their areas of origination, certainly indicates that they were going primarily to fulfill their dream of being a part of a Jewish nation, not merely to escape the Soviet government or harsh economic conditions. About their later counterparts, the same cannot be said.

Soviet Jews Discover America

In 1974 a major turning point was reached in the pattern of Soviet Jewish emigration. In this year the percentage of Soviet Jews who did not go to Israel jumped from three percent to nineteen percent.[5] This figure continued to rise, reaching forty-nine percent in 1976, and staying at over fifty percent for the remainder of the second wave.[6] This rapid upswing of "dropouts" was indicative of a new type of emigrant, one less concerned with the Jewish state than with individual safety and welfare.

The year 1974 was indeed the crux of the situation. During this year, an experiment of sorts was conducted among the emigrating Soviet Jews, an experiment designed to measure the acceptance of "dropouts." This exercise was not planned in any way; it just occurred. Its results, however, were conclusive. The Soviet government refused to issue an exit visa with any other listed final destination than Israel.[7] On the other hand, Soviet officials proved quite willing to turn their heads in Vienna if an emigre somehow boarded a plane to the United States. With 1974's considerable final tally of a nineteen-percent dropout rate, Jews in the Soviet Union knew that there was an alternative to the Israeli route.

Even with such a route available, why would a person desire to pick up his family and move to another country, leaving his old friends, occupation, and nationality behind? Jerome Gilman, an emigration specialist, states that "The second wave of Soviet-Jewish emigration in the seventies was more a response to worsening conditions in the Soviet Union than to an allure of any particular alternative."[8] Gilman follows with a series of high invectives against the Soviet regime during the seventies, characterizing the period as one of lost social dynamism, led by aged conservatives who were "afraid of change, afraid of new ideas, engrossed in protecting the status quo and in rooting out all opposition."[9] He rails that the absence of considered and meaningful social goals resulted

in a society centered on individual success, contrary to the official ideology of the Soviet state. Such hypocrisy led to the natural outgrowth of a corrupt and cynical society.[10]

On top of the increasingly unpleasant general social scene, the Jews were victims of a vicious anti-Semitic propaganda campaign. This tactic has been discussed in an earlier section, and without repeating details, one may say that for many Jews, it left them with an increased desire to leave the Soviet Union.

With such conclusions in mind, the results of a survey of late seventies' emigrants may be examined without surprise. "When emigrants from this period were surveyed, they cited discrimination on the basis of nationality, cultural or political motivations, economic reasons, and family reunification as chief factors motivating their decision to emigrate."[11] These reasons, taken together, indicate the typical "new" emigrant of the second wave.

As the catalysts for emigration changed, so did the origins of the emigrant pool. With religious reasons much less weighted, nationalization had very little effect on the decision to emigrate. What it did affect, however, was the final destination of the emigrant. Seventy-two percent of all emigres from Russia and the Ukraine, very assimilated areas, went to the United States. On the other hand, only six percent of the Georgians and thirteen percent of the Central Asians went to the U.S.[12] With the

growing percentage of emigrants going to the U.S., it is obvious that there was a remarkable surge in the number of emigrants from the assimilated areas. The surge occurred in these densely packed areas because these were the Jews who felt most the dragging social dynamics, who felt most the anti-Semitic propaganda campaign, and who felt most the lure of new opportunities. They saw an avenue of escape in the emigration of their more religious cultural cousins, and they saw new possibilities in a route to America.

America's Closed Door

When the third wave of emigration began in 1987, the chief motivating factors for emigration remained fairly constant with what they were in 1979--fear of discrimination, fear of a worsening economy, and a desire for family reunification. The majority of Soviet Jewish emigrants were still coming to the U.S., and the majority of those emigrants originated in the Ukraine and the Russian Republic.

Discrimination against the Jewish people in the late eighties had several new twists. For probably the first time in history, the Jews were the victims of anti-Semitism because they were leaving. With so much concern placed on the human rights issue of Jewish emigration, the entire population of the Soviet Union was well aware of exactly who was leaving their country. When emigration

restrictions for Jews eased in 1987, a seed of resentment began to grow in the minds of nationalists throughout the Soviet state. Yevgeny Velikhov, director of the Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy and member of the Central Committee, states poignantly, "But if you want to talk about emigration, why not put it in general terms--why always, or mainly, in terms of Jews? Shouldn't everyone have the right to leave the Soviet Union?"[13] He goes on to reveal another source of resentment stemming from the emigration of the Jews, a problem known as "the brain drain." Because the Soviet system provided free education and professional training, a member of that system was expected to feel some sort of obligation to it. Therefore, when a Jew chose to emigrate, especially a well-educated Jew, it appeared as if that individual was reneging on a valid claim to his manual and intellectual resources. Emigration from this standpoint was siphoning some of the best minds out of the country, a problem, and the apparent denial of obligation was causing the build up of huge waves of resentment, another problem.[14] To compound the issue, this resentment simply encouraged other Jews to leave the country.

The very real issue of "the brain drain" can be seen by looking at the occupations of Soviet Jews when they arrive in Israel. Completely unskilled labor accounts for only twelve percent of Israeli immigrants. Engineers and technicians make up thirty-eight percent of those

immigrants, while twenty-one percent of the immigrants are in academics. Eleven percent are in the medical field, and the rest are in marketing, administration, art and social fields, service positions, or otherwise skilled labor employments.[15] With such a concentrated number of educated people flowing out of the country, the Soviets are not imagining "the brain drain" phenomenon.

In 1989, 70,000 Soviet Jews were allowed to leave. Only 12,000 of that number went to Israel.[16] The majority of the rest came to the U.S.[17] Also in 1989, President Bush announced that the United States would no longer consider Soviet Jews as refugees, and he set a ceiling for total Soviet immigration at 50,000.[18] Made primarily for economic reasons, this announcement still came as a shock for thousands of Jews wanting to emigrate to the U.S. rather than Israel. Be that as it may, the net impact of the new immigration restriction was to force the now free-to-leave emigrant to go to Israel, as he was no longer free to come to the U.S. Israel's mass immigration was on.

Soviet Jews were still emigrating for better economic conditions and because of anti-Semitism. Zionism was barely a consideration. However, it seems that by forcing the Soviet Jews to go to Israel, the U.S. also triggered a wave of Zionist feelings. These feelings were usually manifested after a Soviet group arrived in Israel, but they appeared to be genuine. Groups of transplanted Russians could be seen singing songs of "Zionism" in religious

meetings, even though by their own admission they had no deep religious feeling upon their departure from the Soviet Union.[19]

After Bush closed the door on the Soviet Jews, many of them still held out for admission to the U.S. Over 30,000 applicants were on file at the U.S. embassy in Moscow, with another 30,000 on an informal waiting list (Pear, The New York Times, 3 September 1989, 1, 1, 6). These determined would-be Americans saw Israel as overcrowded, dangerous, and lacking in employment opportunities (more about Israel's problems in the next part), but they still wanted out of the Soviet Union. That sentiment was shared by all Soviet Jewish emigrants.

Part IV: Israeli Absorption of the Soviet Jews

Israel is a state founded on mass immigration. The destiny of the state has been described as the "homeland and safe haven for Jews around the world."[1] When the large influx of Soviet Jews began in 1968, the Israeli government rejoiced and welcomed the immigrants with open arms. Twenty years later, with Soviet Jews immigrating at record rates, the Israelis have not changed.

There exists in a Israel a basic mythology, its origins founded in a picture of the holocaust survivors being carried ashore on the shoulders of the Jewish priesthood while an illegal immigration fleet lies beached on the coast of their ancient homeland. This set of beliefs accords that all Jewish immigrants will be welcomed, that Israel is the place of refuge for Jews, and that Israel is their last, best hope.

From 1971 to 1990, almost four hundred thousand Soviet Jews availed themselves of this last, best hope, and still the state of Israel opened its arms wide, encouraging and at times even imploring the world's Jews to return once again to the home that was again theirs. The growth of the nation of Israel, however, was not without its growing pains.

Housing

The major problems with absorbing the Soviet-Jewish

immigrants had almost always centered around three issues--housing, employment, and the resettlement process. Housing was an obvious issue, as the number of people that Israel can accommodate is naturally limited by space. The government had been in the process of renting temporary housing and constructing permanent dwellings since the magnitude of the Soviet-Jewish influx was first felt. The simple truth was that it could not keep up. Most immigrants were settled somewhere other than their first choice because of space considerations,[2] and with the torrent of immigrants in 1990, new arrivals were as often as not bedded down in tent towns, transit camps, or in large refugee compounds consisting of tin, wood, and canvas huts.[3]

Contrary to popular thought, the housing shortage did not force the Soviet Jews to settle in the occupied territories. Although housing was available there and such housing was an alternative, a survey published in June of 1990 found only three thousand seven hundred Soviet Jews living in the occupied territories, less than one percent of Soviet-Jewish immigrants.[4]

Employment

The second major issue concerning the Soviet-Jewish immigrants was unemployment or, more descriptively, unsuitable employment. As already stated, the average

Soviet immigrant was extremely skilled, a characteristic which became a problem when those skills were no longer needed in the Israeli work force. For example, in 1990 Israel had three standing national symphony orchestras, a number considered large even by the most liberal of music lovers. According to the Israeli Embassy, enough Soviet musicians had landed by the end of 1990 to form an additional five complete symphony orchestras.[5] Such an influx of talent would certainly be beneficial for Israel in the long run, but dealing with the skilled workers as they arrived presented an ever-growing problem.

The problem of employment was compounded not only by the skill level of the Soviet-Jewish immigrants but also by their age demographics. For example, in 1990 the largest portion of the immigrants, 36 percent, were ages 25 to 44, the age at which they needed employment.[6] That statistic translates to 66,024 new jobs needed in the country of Israel in a single year. Such jobs as street sweeping, long considered as "Arab work," were very much in demand by Soviet Jews with few alternatives.[7]

The Resettlement Process

The last major problem that Israel had with the Soviet Jews was in the process of resettlement. Early Soviet-Jewish immigrants caused a need for a specific format for their absorption, and this need was filled by

the quasi-governmental organization known as the Jewish Agency, which worked hand in hand with its true governmental counterpart, the Absorption Ministry. These organizations were responsible for acquiring temporary housing, the building of permanent homes, the recruitment and training of absorption staff, hiring language teachers and social workers, planning and implementing training courses, and dealing with the acceptance of immigrant students to Israeli universities.[8] With the centralization of the absorption process, a specific template for immigration from the Soviet Union was laid.

A Soviet-Jewish immigrant to Israel began his journey with the plane flight to Israel, which was until October 1990 a two-stage affair. The first stage was typically on a Hungarian, Romanian, or Polish charter flight, and the second on the national airline of Israel, El Al.[9] After October 1990, direct flights to Israel from the Soviet Union were allowed.[10] The air fare for all immigrants was paid for by the Israeli government. Upon arrival in Israel, the immigrants were allowed one phone call each to the Soviet Union at no cost. The immigrants were given free taxi rides to their destinations. Those with nowhere to go were either lodged in hotels free of charge for two weeks, or taken to an Absorption center where they could stay until they found an apartment. Before they left the airport, they registered with the Absorption Ministry and obtained an identification card bearing their photograph.

When they registered, they were given an "absorption basket" containing a rights booklet, start-up money ranging from $250 for an individual to $3000 for a family, depending on size, plus an additional $125 per person for immediate needs. During the first year in Israel, a family might be granted up to $15,000 in rent stipends.[11]

As of 1990, substantial resentment over the start up money and the rent stipends had increased among some Israelis. A factor in this resentment was that landlords were evicting older tenants to replace them with the subsidized Soviet Jews.[12] Rumors circulating about immigrants demanding specific jobs or living places were also contributing factors. There existed in Israel a misunderstanding of motivation. The Israelis thought they were doing the Soviet Jews a favor by taking them away from the Soviet Union, while the Soviet-Jewish immigrant felt as though he had fought his way through a vast bureaucratic entity to achieve his end, an end which included reinforcing the beleaguered Jewish homeland.[13] Although this formulae may have been more appropriate to the immigrants of the seventies and eighties, surely the same type of gap in perception continued through 1990.

Absorption Successes

Dr. Theodore Friedgut, the senior lecturer in Russian studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, has

identified 1973 as a turning point for the absorption of Soviet Jews in Israel. According to Friedgut, by this time there was a large, settled community of Soviet Jews in Israel to ease the transition period for newer immigrants. Also, the ongoing Yom Kippur War of late 1973 helped produce a cohesive bond between all Israelis, including the newcomers from the USSR.[14] He points out that from 1973 on, Israel's re-emigration rate was one of the lowest in the world at five percent.[15] Such an encouraging statistic indicated that the absorption process did have its successes.

A 1974 survey conducted on Soviet-Jewish immigrants showed that while the social life and the social status of the immigrants underwent very little net change, their standards of living had risen significantly.[16] With the shattering Soviet economy of 1990, most of the Soviet-Jewish immigrants could probably say that their standard of living increased with the move to Israel as well. The immigrants of the seventies, eighties, and 1990 were greeted in the same manner: an unreserved welcome by the government and the people as well. Even the Israeli citizens discomforted by the mass of immigrants looked at the situation with aplomb. Said one such citizen, echoing a phrase from the 1949 ingathering of holocaust victims, "The situation is impossible, but not hopeless."[17]

There were...and are...advantages in the Soviet-Jewish migration for the Israeli government as well. The more

Jews in Israel, the more secure a place that nation has in the Middle East. For some reason, the Jewish population does not increase as fast as that of the Arabs. In early 1990, Israel was 60 percent Jewish, but the Jewish demographic advantage will end by the year 2020.[18] Every plane load of Soviet Jews pushes that date back a little further. Also, one of Israel's purposes is to be a homeland and haven for all Jews, and every Soviet Jew who comes to Israel takes the state one step closer to fulfilling its purpose.

Conclusion: The Promise

It is estimated by the Israeli government that Soviet-Jewish immigration will account for one million immigrants in the years 1991 to 1995.[1] This total increases Israel's population by 25 percent, and is comparable to the United States absorbing the nation of France. The Soviet Union will be hard pressed to allow so many of its highly trained and educated citizens to depart, but the nation will profit more from the freedom their departure heralds than from their presence within its boundaries. The emigrants are searching for new lives, and if they return to Israel they will be well taken care of by those that came before them. And Israel? Israel comes that much closer to gathering all of his children together. Although that will undoubtedly present problems right now, the state of Israel has met many such problems in its past and has somehow prevailed over them all. As Absorption Minister Yitzhak Peretz states, "In the short run, it's a great problem. In the long run, it's a great promise."[2]

Appendix

Tables and Graphs

Emigration from the U.S.S.R. since 1968

Table 1

Year	Jews who left the U.S.S.R.	Those to Israel	Year	Jews who left the U.S.S.R.	Those to Israel
1968	229	231	1980	21471	7570
1969	2979	3033	1981	9447	1558
1970	1027	999	1982	2688	734
1971	13022	12819	1983	1314	387
1972	31681	31652	1984	896	340
1973	34733	33477	1985	1140	348
1974	20628	16816	1986	914	206
1975	13221	8531	1987	8155	2072
1976	14261	7279	1988	18961	2173
1977	16736	8348	1989	71142	12101
1978	28864	12192	1990	200279	183400
1979	51320	17614			

Table 1. Emigration from the USSR since 1968. Compiled from Goodman, 22 and Israeli Embassy, telephone conversation.

* The obvious discrepancies in the initial data reflect the difficulties in securing reliable data for those early years. The figures given are the most reliable for the individual categories.

Israeli Immigration

Figure 1

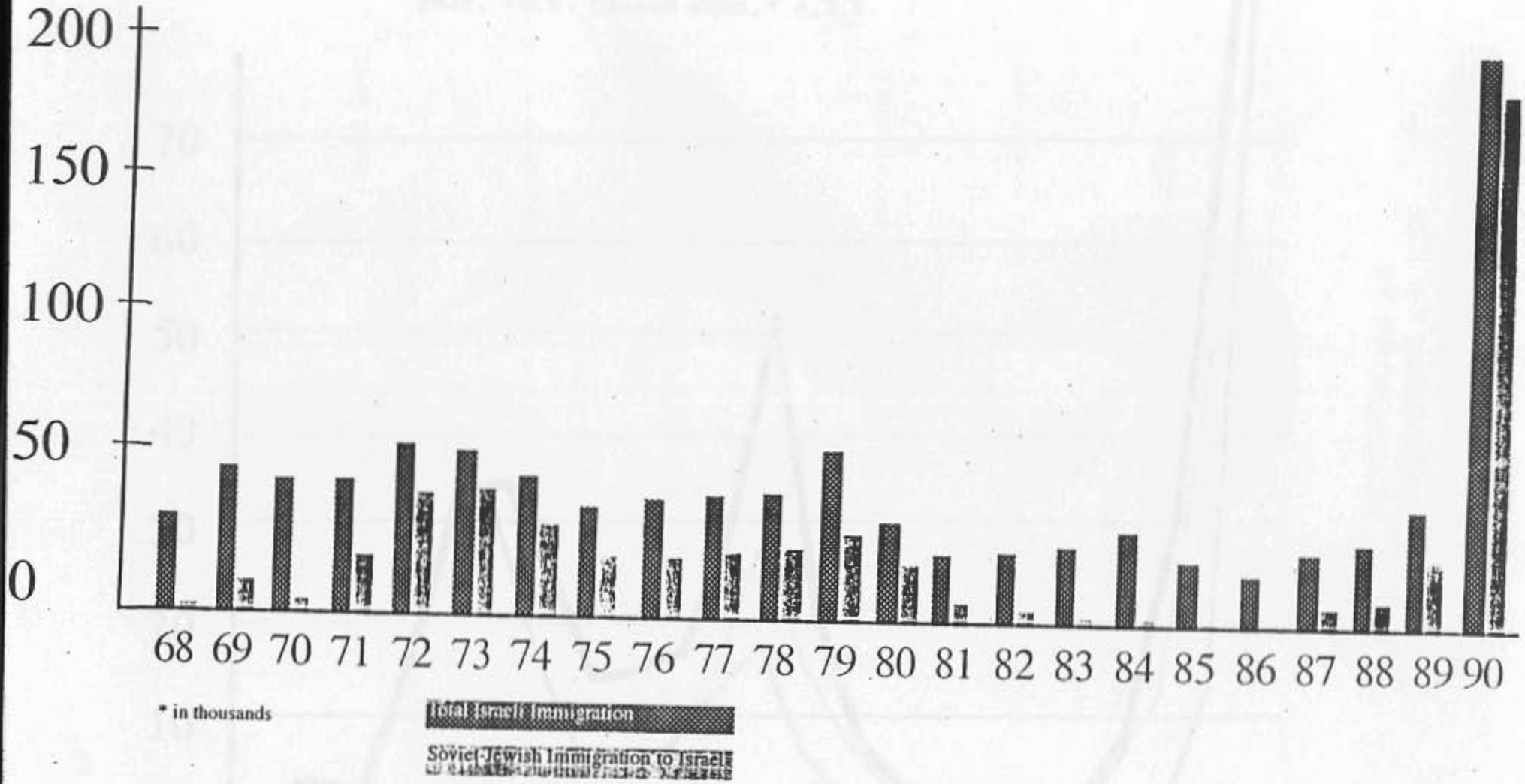
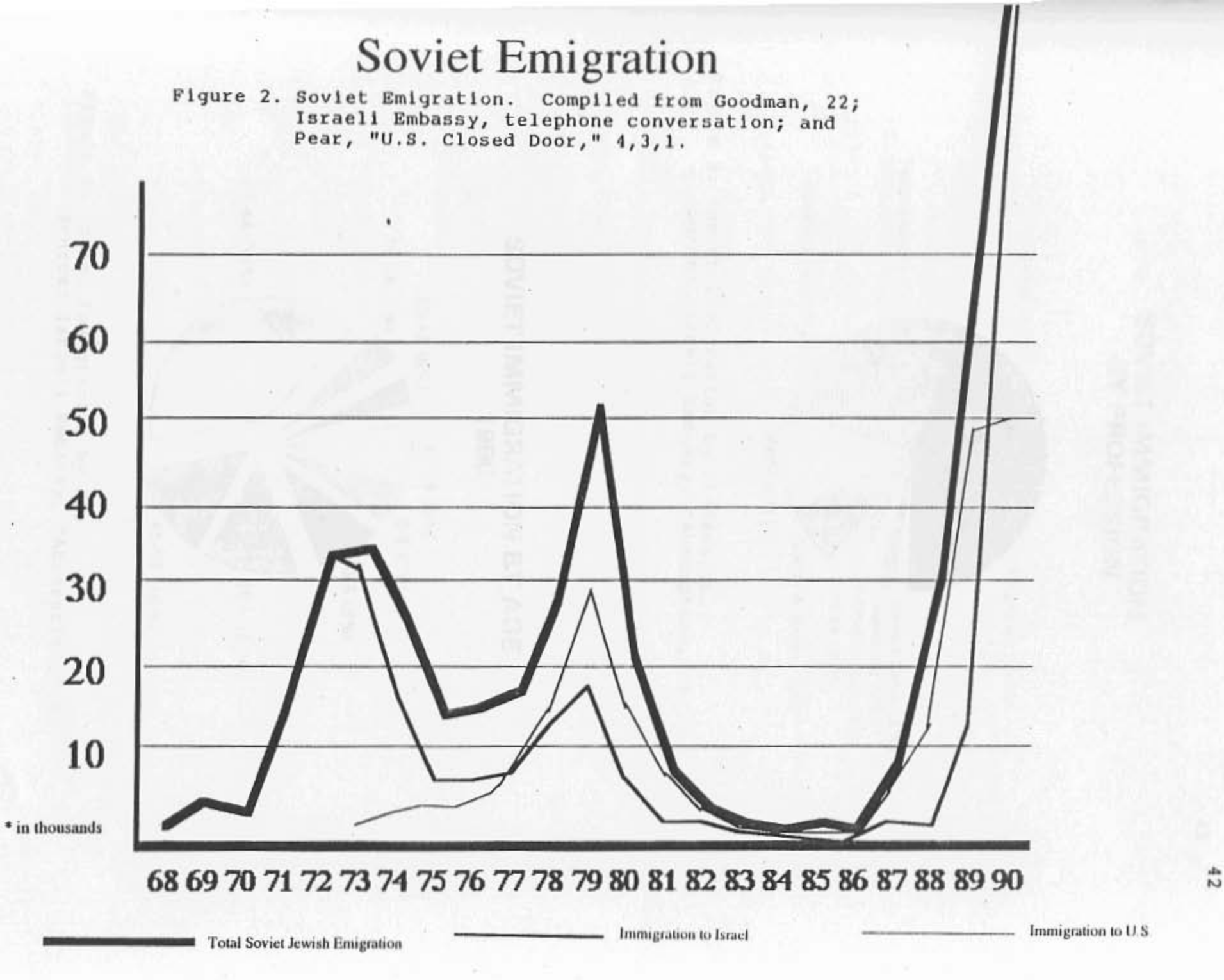


Figure 1. Israeli Immigration. Compiled from Goodman, 22; Israeli Embassy, telephone conversation; and Israeli Embassy, "Absorption," 2.

Soviet Emigration

Figure 2. Soviet Emigration. Compiled from Goodman, 22; Israeli Embassy, telephone conversation; and Pear, "U.S. Closed Door," 4,3,1.



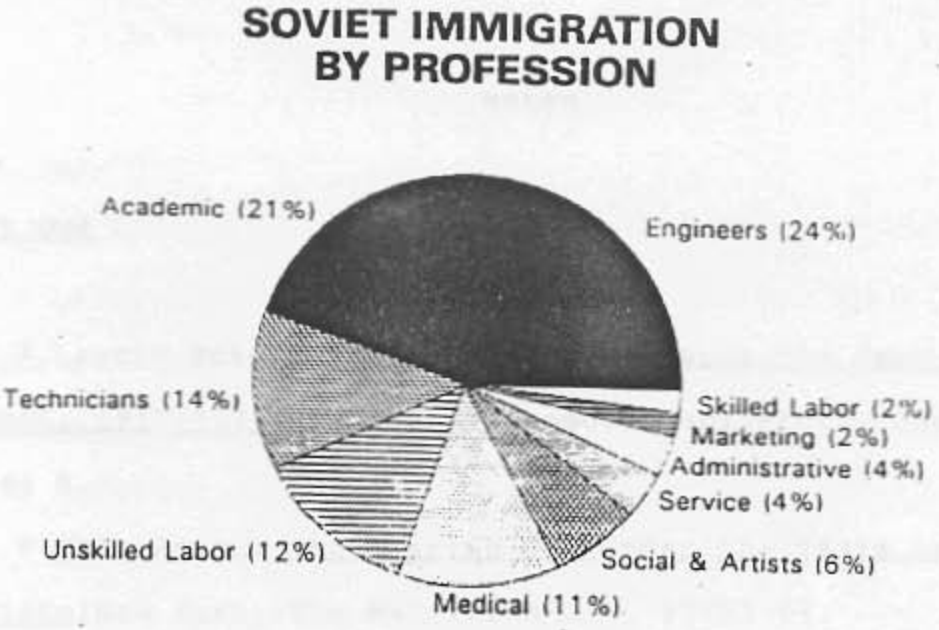


Figure 3. Soviet Immigration by Profession.
Source: Israeli Embassy, "Absorption," 4.

Figure 4. Soviet Immigration by Age.
Source: Israeli Embassy, "Absorption," 3.

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[7] Baron, 169.

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[9] Schechtman, 112.

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[18] Salitan, 184.

[19] Salitan, 184.

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[21] Salitan, 186.

[22] Salitan, 186.

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[31] Clark, 300.

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[13] Friedgut, 69.

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